

Darkness

(Andhakara/ අන්ධකාර Sutta)

The main purpose of Buddhist doctrines is to explain the path of happiness or liberation. On the other hand, Buddhism indicates how to overcome sorrow and lamentation. Here, the Supreme Buddha points out the path how to improve our wisdom since the cessation of suffering completely depends on the progress of wisdom. Buddhism and its practice are like the ocean deepens. When we listen to what the Buddha taught, we are able to know how suffering arises gradually. Also, when we practice the Buddha's message, little by little we can get rid of suffering. The result can be seen according to our knowledge, intelligence and dedication.

Explaining the discourse of Darkness, *Andhakara Sutta*, the Enlightened One declares the danger of ignorance which is the main cause of all sufferings.

The Buddha says;

*“Atthi, bhikkhave, lokantarikā aghā asaṃvutā andhakārā andha-kā-ra-timisā, yatthamimesaṃ can-dima-sūriyā-naṃ evaṃ-ma-hiddhi-kā-naṃ evaṃ mahānubhāvānaṃ ābhāya nānubhontī”*ti.

“Bhikkhus, there are world interstices, vacant and abysmal regions of blinding darkness and gloom, where the light of the sun and moon, so powerful and mighty, does not reach.”

When this was said, a certain bhikkhu said to the Blessed One:

“That darkness, venerable sir, is indeed great; that darkness is indeed very great. Nevertheless, is there, venerable sir, any other darkness greater and more frightful than that one?”

The Buddha says, “There is, bhikkhu.”

“But what, venerable sir, is that darkness greater and more frightful than that one?”

Again, the Supreme One says,

*Katamo pana, bhante, etamhā andhakārā añño andhakāro mahantataro ca bhayānakataro cā”*ti? *“Ye hi keci, bhikkhu, samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā ‘idaṃ dukkhan’*ti *yathābhūtaṃ nappajānanti ... pe ... ‘ayaṃ duk-kha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā’*ti *yathābhūtaṃ nappajānanti, te jāti-saṃ-vatta-ni-kesu saṅkhāresu abhīramanti ... pe ... abhīratā ... pe ... abhi-saṅ-kha-ronti ... pe ... abhi-saṅ-kha-ritvā jātandha-kā-rampi papatanti, jarandha-kā-rampi papatanti, mara-ṇandha-kā-rampi papatanti, soka-pari-deva-duk-kha-do-manas-supāyā-sandha-kā-rampi papatanti. Te na parimuccanti jātiyā jarāya maraṇena sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi. ‘Na parimuccanti dukkhasmā’*ti *vadāmi.*

“Those ascetics and brahmins, bhikkhu, who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is suffering’; who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is the origin of suffering’; who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is the cessation of suffering’; who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’—they delight in volitional formations that lead to birth, in volitional formations that lead to aging, in volitional formations that lead to death, in volitional formations that lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. Delighting in such volitional formations, they generate volitional formations that lead to birth, generate volitional formations that lead to aging, generate volitional formations that lead to death, generate volitional formations that lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. Having generated such volitional formations, they tumble into the darkness of birth, tumble into the darkness of aging, tumble into the darkness of death, tumble into the darkness of sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. They are not freed from birth, aging, and death; not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; not freed from suffering, I say.

“But, bhikkhu, those ascetics and brahmins who understand as it really is: ‘This is suffering’ ... ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’—they do not delight in volitional formations that lead to birth, nor in volitional formations that lead to aging, nor in volitional formations that lead to death, nor in volitional formations that lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. Not delighting in such volitional formations, they do not generate volitional formations that lead to birth, nor generate volitional formations that lead to aging, nor generate volitional formations that lead to death, nor generate volitional formations that lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. Not having generated such volitional formations, they do not tumble into the darkness of birth, nor tumble into the darkness of aging, nor tumble into the darkness of death, nor tumble into the darkness of sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. They are freed from birth, aging, and death; freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; freed from suffering, I say.

Here the Buddha says, he who doesn't know the suffering and its cessation that is the severe darkness in the world. In this situation the main teaching of Buddhism is that giving understanding how to get rid of ignorance and achieve wisdom to the maximum level.

According to Buddhism, all unwholesome thoughts fall into three categories. They are;

1. Desire (*Lobha*)
2. Anger (*Dosa*)
3. Delusion (*Moha*)

These are the main defilements which disturb our peace of mind. If we have more unwholesome emotions, it means we have more suffering. If we have less defilements, it means we have less suffering. He who needs to live with more happiness has to reduce these defilements. Those who are clever to decrease these three defilements completely from their mind can overcome suffering and unsatisfactoriness completely in this life itself. Desire means the attachment or lust, craving or greed. Anger means conflict or ill will. Delusion means unknowing of the world reality or ignorance of impermanence.

Our success in the path of liberation depends on how far we have reduced these three unwholesome thoughts. We can see two levels on the path of reducing defilements. First level is the surface level which is a temporary solution. The second level is deep level that is the ultimate and permanent solution. In the second level, our vision should change completely from ignorance to wisdom into the correct way that helps to eradicate defilements completely.

By listening to the Buddha's teaching, we gradually go forward on the path of liberation. In the first level of reducing defilements, we can practice generosity to reduce desire or severe attachment. When we are ready to donate something to others concerning their qualities or needs, our mind is free from desire or covetousness. Then greed in mind gradually decreases. Also, contemplating on impurity of the body parts helps to overcome craving and lustful desire with people. When we practice loving kindness for all people in the world, anger also decreases. We mostly lose our inner peace because of anger. Also, people mostly suffer because of anger. Practicing loving kindness '**wishing may all beings be well happy and peaceful**' benefits us to reduce anger and ill will. That is why the Buddha has recommended practicing loving kindness at the very beginning on the path of liberation. As the result of practicing loving kindness, we begin to see all beings as our only child. Then most of our conflicts with people cease. This attitude is the highest in the spiritual development. Practicing loving kindness is one of the signs that we are on the path of liberation from suffering and unsatisfactoriness. To decrease delusion, we should be aware of ourselves which consist with body and mind. The Karmic law that means what we have done in our past lives and we do in this life effects our future lives as well as this life. The Karmic law is a big shadow which acts behind us. If we have this knowledge about the karmic law, our patience gradually increases when problems come to our life. Also, the knowledge that everything is impermanent increases with developing wisdom. The experience that we receive through our senses arises and ceases at the moment. If we have this understanding, we are able to live equally in sufferable or pleasurable situations.

In the second level, we go deeper to reduce defilements permanently. Here, knowledge, reflection and practice are very important. We have attachment and anger because we are unaware of our real experience. The nature of all our experiences is instant. The experience that we receive with our senses arises and ceases at the moment according to conditions. When conditions are together, the experiences as forms, sounds, smell, taste, touch, mental formations arise at the moment. The experience doesn't come to the present from the past. And it doesn't go to the future from the present. **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence.** (අනුත්වා සම්භවං නුත්වා න භවිස්සති). When conditions separate, the experience ceases without anything remaining. Every thought arises at the moment and ceases at the moment effecting to next thought, but the present thought doesn't go to the future thought. This is the reality that we experience every moment. However, because of our ignorance we think that the experience remains after we experienced it. We live in the ceased experience when we think about that experience. This is the main cause of suffering. If we have this knowledge about the cause of suffering, we reflect on it again and again in our daily life. And also, we try to eradicate defilements permanently by practicing the path leading to the cessation of suffering. After the understanding of the process of arising and ceasing of suffering, we should practice the path that leads to overcome ignorance completely. The path is the eightfold path that consists with three disciplines.

They are;

1. Virtue (*Seela*)
2. Tranquility (*Samādhi*)
3. Wisdom (*Paññā*)

With the clear knowledge of the cessation of suffering, we develop self-discipline in our speech and behavior. Before we do or speak something, we reflect on it again and again whether it is good or bad, right or wrong, whether it is useful in this life and here after. As much as we have this discipline in our behavior, we have no mistakes. We can remember our life with a pleasant mind because of our good behavior. This discipline in our behavior and speech helps us to go forward in the path of purification practicing meditation purifying the mind. Virtue or moral conduct is the foundation of the spiritual path. Therefore, the Buddha has mostly pointed out the importance of practicing virtue. Discipline in senses is also very important and useful for a successful moral life. Because of virtuous life we are honored in the society where we live.

In purification of the mind, we mainly use two meditation techniques that are tranquility (or concentration) and insight. In the tranquility meditation, we keep our mind with a particular good thought. As a result of concentrated mind, we can live for a long time without suffering and stress, but it is not permanent and it can be changed. Here we practice and develop our awareness especially in mind and body. We practice to do all kinds of activities mindfully. Mindfulness is one of the most important qualities that we have to develop for purification of our mind. Also, mindfulness helps us to keep our mind in the present moment. The nature of our mind is going to the past and future without awareness. By practicing tranquility meditation, we train our mind to live in the present moment with mindfulness. And when mind goes to the past or future we are aware of the mind. There are forty techniques in Buddhism to develop mindfulness. When we practice those techniques with right understanding, we don't stop in concentration. We go forward seeing world reality which is impermanent. Then we see every experience we receive through our mind is impermanent, suffering and egoless. As the result of this high comprehension we are used to live without any conflicts with anything or anyone.



May the Triple Gem Bless you! ඔබ සැමට තෙරුවන් සරණයි!

May you be mindful and wise! (සනිමත් සහ නුවණැති වන්න)

May all beings be well, happy and peaceful! (සියලු සත්ත්වයෝ සුවපත් වෙත්වා!)

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